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BOOK Charge Betrayed A

Former Analyst Claims Boicned Vietnam Pullout 'Squandered Lives'

By Henry S. Bradsher
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Defying CIA rules to publish an uncensored account of the fall of Vietnam, a former top CIA agent in Saigon says senior U.S. officials allowed themselves to be deceived about Communist intentions and as a result abandoned thousands of loyal Vietnamese in an ill-prepared evacuation that "was an institutional disgrace."

Key American officials refused to believe accounts of the rot in the Nguyen Van Thieu regime or spies' reports of North Vietnamese plans during the two years between the 1973 Paris cease-fire agreement and the fall of Saigon, according to the agent's new book, "Decent Interval."

The book pictures Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham A. Martin, and the CIA station chief in Saigon, Thomas Polgar, as suppressing unpleasant truths to try to sell to the U.S. Congress optimistic assessments of the Vietnam situation.

AS THE SITUATION finally began to crumble in March and April 1975, the book says, the Soviet Union sent messages to Kissinger, and Hungarian diplomats told things to Polgar that delayed American evacuation plans. For the CIA, this caused "squandered lives, blown secrets and the betrayal of agents, friends and collaborators."

"Not since the abortive Bay of

Pigs invasion of 1961 had the agency put so much on the line, and lost it through stupidity and mismanagement," the book says.

The author, Frank W. Snepp III, says he found the CIA unwilling "to deal candidly with the Vietnam issue." Three weeks after receiving the CIA's Medal of Merit, he resigned from the agency with the decision to write his own account and not "submit my manuscript to the agency for clearance and censorship, as all former employees-turned-author are required to do."

The CIA was already selectively leaking a favorable version of what had happened to journalistic favorites of Kissinger's, Snepp wrote. If it could do this "to whitewash its role in Vietnam, it had forfeited the right to censor me in the name of security or national interest," Snepp said.

THE PUBLICATION and distribution of the 602-page book were conducted secretly by Random House, Snepp said in the foreword. The reason was to avoid possible CIA moves to try to stop its appearance with a court injunction.

The author, now 34 years old, was a CIA agent in Saigon in 1969-71 and again from 1972 until a helicopter lifted him off the U.S. Embassy roof in the last wave. He interrogated prisoners, debriefed spies and in the last years became the CIA's top ana-

lyst in Vietnam and one of Polgar's main troubleshooters.

The CIA did not have any immediate comment on the book. Its director, Adm. Stansfield M. Turner, reportedly had asked for more information on complaints that Snepp has made about the agency's Vietnam operations. Kissinger was quoted by an aide as calling Snepp's allegations "nonsense."

The book gives a real-life look into an incredible world of spying, deception and intrigue.

The United States had both Vietnamese agents and eavesdropping devices planted in Thieu's inner offices. It also had agents high enough in the Communist system in South Vietnam to report many Hanoi decisions promptly and accurately.

HANOI HAD ITS well-placed spies, too. One close to Thieu reported in December 1974 what the South Vietnamese government expected to happen in 1975, enabling the Communists to outmaneuver it. "Among those responsible for the ultimate North Vietnamese victory," Snepp wrote, "the spy in Thieu's entourage clearly must rank high on the credit list."

Some of the deception was aimed at Congress. Snepp described how a congressional investigating delegation was fed slanted material in February 1975. Intelligence reports were doctored to support Ford administration arguments for more aid for Vietnam — even though money was being sought more for political

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